

## “I Used to Have One...”

When you get involved in the sport of dogs, someone should warn you that you'll be doing a great deal of driving. Training classes, events, meetings - nothing is just around the corner.

To alleviate the boredom of traveling long distances on seemingly undifferentiated highways, I've taken refuge in listening to National Public Radio. The topics covered vary tremendously, and it's a great way to make the miles of driving fly by. A recent program was about the fascinating psychological concept of cognitive dissonance, which is the uncomfortable feeling caused when one holds two contradictory ideas simultaneously. For example, a man sees himself as a savvy consumer but spends an exorbitant amount of money on a new car. To resolve this contradiction, he rationalizes the purchase by telling himself that the new vehicle is much less likely to break down and therefore will keep him safe. This belief may or may not be true, but it reduces dissonance and makes the man feel better.

What does this have to do with Weimaraners? Let me answer with another question. Has the following ever happened to you?

You're traveling along an interstate, and pull into a rest stop to give your Weimaraner a chance to stretch his legs. Walking back to your vehicle, you notice that you're being intently watched by a person who takes the initiative to come over to you and your dog. You brace yourself. Then the fateful words are uttered, "I used to have a Weimaraner."

You are at a juncture point. The next thing out of the stranger's mouth will either be fond reminiscence of his dog, or "war stories" about the dog's destructive, unmanageable behavior.

The folks who have positive recollections of their Weimaraner are a delight. They use the situation to conjure up personal memories and love of the breed. You'll hear stories of their dog's loyalty, companionship, intelligence, and how it was a member of the family. Talking to these people reinforces your feelings that you've definitely picked the right breed with which to share your life.

And then there's the other extreme - people who go out of their way to rail about the gray "hell on paws" that was impossible to train, ripped up the sofa, had separation anxiety, and on and on. You have to wonder why they even stopped you. Worse yet, there's an implied statement that you have to be crazy to have a Weimaraner.

It's an uncomfortable conversation. What are you supposed to say? Somehow the sight of your Weimaraner reminded the person of how they were outfoxed by a dog, and they're still carrying those scars. It's best to fall back on the old phrase, "They're not a breed for everyone," keep it short and retreat. No matter what you say, you're not going to convince them that a Weimaraner can be just wonderful. The damage has been done, and a short roadside conversation is not going to change their attitude.

You've just witnessed a perfect example of cognitive dissonance. A man buys a Weimaraner because he thinks it's the most wonderful breed. Things don't work out, so his subsequent belief is that the Weimaraners is a horrible breed.

The next time you hear the phrase, "I used to have a Weimaraner," be prepared. You may be about to deal with someone who has a case of cognitive dissonance.

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